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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001402

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [FR](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: BOUTEFLIKA'S STRATEGIC MANEUVERING ON THE  
FRANCO-ALGERIAN FRIENDSHIP ACCORD

REF: A. ALGIERS 1084

[1](#)B. PARIS 4560

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

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[1](#)1. (C) President Bouteflika has spoken out twice in the last ten days against the French law passed by the French Parliament in February citing the positive achievements of the French colonial period. Prior to Bouteflika's comments, however, Algerian Foreign Minister Mohamed Bedjaoui spoke of a need to focus on the future rather than the past. The Algerian press and political leaders have vied with one another in grandstanding and expressing outrage over the insulting and insensitive nature of the French law, with several suggesting that the law could undermine the chances of concluding the Franco-Algerian Friendship Accord in the works since April 2003. The French Ambassador believes Bouteflika's sharp criticism of the French legislation is designed to get in front of building criticism and then guide attention to the future rather than the past, with a view to concluding the passage of the Friendship Treaty with France before the end of the year. The orgy of criticism, coupled with continued signals about concluding the Friendship Treaty, underscore Algeria's continuing love-hate relationship with France, its prickly nationalist pride, and its greater assertiveness, as it emerges from over a decade of terrorism and diplomatic ostracism. (End Summary and Comment)

BOUTEFLIKA CONDEMNS 23 FEBRUARY FRENCH LAW

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[1](#)2. (U) France was the target of some sharp criticism by Bouteflika in May on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the 1945 massacres in Setif (Ref A). After a brief respite without public comment, the criticism resumed in late June, this time focused on a law passed by the French parliament in February that cited the positive achievements of the French colonial period (civilizing mission). President Bouteflika has spoken out twice in the last ten days against the law. In a June 30 speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the General Union of Algerian Muslim Students (UGEMA) and its role in Algerian independence, Bouteflika rejected the notion that colonialization has been a civilizing experience for Algerian society. On the contrary, it had been "a massive undertaking to decivilize them. It is difficult not to be incensed by the law voted by the French Parliament on 23 February and which represents a mental blindness bordering on negativism and revisionism."

[1](#)3. (U) On July 2, Bouteflika gave another speech celebrating the founding of the National Liberation Army (ALN) and said, "We must be vigilant towards these laws emanating from the French Parliament that are far from innocent." He continued his comments by saying, "How can a parliament glorify a colonial presence guilty of massacres against an entire people and pretend that this presence rendered service to the colonized peoples?" Prior to these statements, the only Algerian principal who had criticized the law had been former Foreign Minister and current head of the National Liberation Front (FLN), Abdelaziz Belkhadem.

BEDJAOUI OUT OF TOUCH?

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[1](#)4. (SBU) Bouteflika's comments are all the more surprising when compared to public statements of Algerian Foreign Minister Mohamed Bedjaoui made just weeks earlier. In a June 14 speech, Bedjaoui told reporters that the French law came as a "surprise" to Algeria, but he underlined that the Friendship Accord agreed to by Bouteflika and Chirac in 2003 was "important" and that "each country must assume its responsibilities in this regard....and turn our focus towards the future." On June 25, he commented that the absence of an official Algerian reaction to the French law was wise and that it was unnecessary to "throw oil onto the fire. The trial for colonialism is not expected in 2005; colonialism is

already condemned."

POSITIVE REMARKS ON ALGERIAN-FRENCH FRIENDSHIP ACCORD

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15. (C) Bouteflika did strike a positive note for the Friendship Accord in his June 30 speech, however. Bouteflika tempered his remarks against the French Parliament by noting that the Friendship Accord would not be derailed: "The Algerians extend with goodwill to the French a fraternal hand to take up the challenges of the future and to finish with the times of colonialism and the universal claim of the West." French Ambassador Hubert Colin de Verdire privately commented to Ambassador that Bouteflika was positioning himself politically to go forward with the Friendship Accord later in the year. By first acknowledging the internal criticisms about the French law, Bouteflika could, in the French Ambassador's view, prepare public opinion and then win support for passage of the Friendship Accord.

ERDMAN